

Spanish season on schedule

Football

AFP, Madrid

Threats of a delay to the start of the Spanish football season disappeared on Monday when eight first division clubs who do not have individual deals and the 22 second division sides agreed a TV rights deal with broadcasters.

The season can now go ahead from Saturday as scheduled following agreement on a three-year deal worth 260 million euros (283 million dollars) Spanish Football League (LFP) president Pedro Tomas said.

Over the three years Sogecable,

which holds the broadcasting rights, will pay the clubs 84, 88 and 92 million euros.

The 12 clubs with the biggest pulling power in Spain, such as champions Real Madrid and Barcelona, have negotiated their own separate deals and the smaller clubs had threatened to pull the plug on the new campaign if they did not receive an acceptable deal of their own.

That stance had led the 12 - Real Madrid, Barcelona, Deportivo La Coruna, Valencia, Villarreal, Espanyol, Atletico Madrid, Real Sociedad, Athletic Bilbao, Seville, Malaga and Murcia - to threaten legal action if the season was delayed.

Lazio target Solari

Football

AFP, Rome

Italian Serie A side Lazio are hoping to sign Real Madrid's Argentine midfielder Santiago Solari on a 12 month loan, according to Italian media reports on Tuesday.

Lazio officials are reported to be flying out to Spain on Tuesday in an attempt to conclude a deal before the start of the Italian football season on Saturday.

However reports suggest that any proposed deal will go through only if Lazio settle their outstanding

debt with Valencia.

Lazio still owe Real Madrid's Spanish rivals six million euros (6.5 million dollars) for midfielder Gaizka Mendietta, who was loaned out to English Premiership side Middlesbrough last week.

Solari, 26, made 26 appearances for Real Madrid last season. Lazio play away to Benfica on Wednesday in the second leg of their Champions League qualifying match.

The Italians won the first leg 3-1 and are well placed to secure a place in the highly lucrative group stages.

Lazio play their first league match on Sunday at home to newly-promoted Lecce.

Morientes linked with Schalke

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid striker Fernando Morientes has been targeted by Schalke 04 officials who are in Madrid negotiating a move, a source close to the Spanish club said on Monday.

General manager of the German club Rudi Aussauer and vice-president in charge of finances Josef Schnusenberg were in Madrid on Monday trying to tie up a deal to reunite Morientes with coach Jupp Heynckes who was Real boss in the 1997/98 season.



FERNANDO MORIENTES



PHOTO: BBC

Manchester City's French striker Nicolas Anelka (R) sends the ball through the legs of Blackburn Rovers goalkeeper Brad Friedel to score the winner at Ewood Park on August 25.

Premiership Anelka takes City atop

Football

AFP, London

France's Nicolas Anelka scored a late winner for Manchester City on Monday in a 3-2 Premiership victory at Blackburn Rovers to shoot City to the top of the Premiership table for the first ever time.

Rovers had twice equalised but with just three minutes left, Anelka made the most of a poor back header to sprint down the left and slot the ball through the legs of keeper Brad Friedel.

It was an embarrassing moment for Blackburn who paid the price for sloppy defending but City manager Kevin Keegan jumped out of his seat with hands aloft.

When asked whether he

intended to nutmeg Friedel, Anelka told Sky Sports television: "I don't know. I just shot and I was happy to hit the target and get the three points."

Blackburn manager Graeme Souness was philosophical about the goal. "Brad had just one of those games tonight," he said.

City went ahead after just four minutes through a Michael Tarnat wonder goal from an unlikely distance. Martin Taylor fouled Anelka close to the midfield circle and from the resulting dead ball move, the German international hit a fierce swerving left-footed freekick which superbly swung low to the left past the outstretched hand of Friedel into the net.

Trevor Sinclair inadvertently put Rovers level with a headed own goal low to the right from six

yards out a minute before the break.

Joey Barton put City in the driving seat for the second time with a right-foot shot from about 18 yards in the 59th minute but Rovers were once more level two minutes later.

A freekick from Brett Emerton found Lorenzo Amoroso who headed home from six yards.

City keeper David Seaman, who was largely at fault for both goals he conceded, nevertheless said it was great to be top of the table and added it would be quite a moment to meet his old Arsenal team-mates again when the two teams meet on Sunday.

"It will be the first time I have seen the lads as I have not had time to get to their training ground and it'll be a great occasion," he said.

The dirty dozen!

AFP, L'Alcudia, Spain

A dozen players were sent off after a mass brawl between Ukraine and Uruguay in an international football tournament here Monday.

The entire Ukraine team walked off when the referee sent off one of their side in the 20th minute and had to be talked back. The match, won 1-0 by Ukraine, was littered with fouls and finished in a free-for-all which the referee sanctioned by sending off another four Ukrainians and seven Uruguayans.

Money League!

AFP, Paris

The 32 clubs who played in last season's Champions League shared out 529 million euros in prize money, European football's governing body UEFA said Tuesday.

However, the bonus payment format and TV rights share-out meant that eventual champions AC Milan picked up 31.5 million euros compared to losing finalists Juventus' 34.7 million euros.

Borussia Dortmund earned 33.6 million euros even though the German side were eliminated after the second phase.



Totti out of qualifiers

AFP, Rome

AS Roma striker Francesco Totti looks set to miss Italy's crunch Euro 2004 qualifier against Wales next month after sustaining an injury to his right hip.

The Roma captain suffered the knock just before half-time in Monday's home friendly against Spanish side Real Betis at the Olympic stadium which ended in a 2-2 draw.

The club said on their website Tuesday the 27-year-old forward is likely to be sidelined for a fortnight which would rule him out of the Wales match at Milan's San Siro stadium on September 6.

Even had he been fit, Totti would not have been able to play in Roma's opening league match of the season away to Udinese on Sunday as he is suspended.

Nonda operation on Thursday

Football

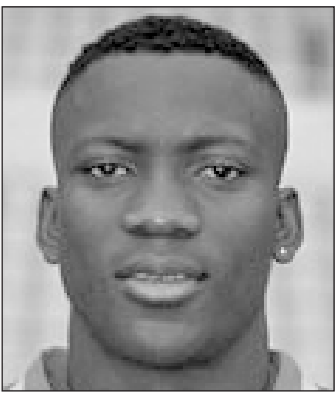
AFP, Monaco

Monaco's Congolese striker Shabani Nonda will undergo surgery Thursday on a serious left knee injury picked up during his team's 4-2 French league win Sunday at Paris Saint Germain which has ended his season.

Team doctor Eric Buracchi said Monday that the player, who is currently receiving treatment for the cruciate ligament injury in Monaco's Princess Grace Hospital would be operated on in Strasbourg by Professor Jaeger, one of the leading knee surgeons in the world.

Nonda, who looked set to repeat last year's feat of top French league scorer with three goals in as many matches this season, suffered the injury five minutes into the game at Parc des Princes following a tackle from PSG defender Jose Pierre-Fanfan, who fell on his left leg.

Buracchi said that scans showed



SHABANI NONDA

that the 26-year-old Nonda had suffered serious damage throughout the knee.

Nonda will be transferred to Strasbourg Tuesday, and will spend up to a fortnight recuperating in Alsace after the operation before beginning the first phase of physiotherapy, with his recovery expected to take eight months.



PHOTO: AFP

Real Betis' Jesus Prada (L) attends AS Roma's captain Francesco Totti (on the ground) after Totti sustained an injury to his right hip during their friendly match at Rome's Olympic stadium on August 25.